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III

Personality Development

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PATERNAL VIOLENCE AND COMPASSION

I

TWO CONTRASTING family types, the Turco-Mongol and the Old-Slavonic—one patriarchal and power-oriented and the other matriarchal and equalitarian—seem to have provided the elements out of which the structure of the Great-Russian extended household was shaped. This family community was known among the Great-Russians as the *bolshaya semya* (the great-family). In its fullest development the Great-Russian joint family consisted of grandparents and their descendants, or of a number of married brothers, their wives and descendants, together with some other incorporated persons—such as adopted husbands or children of a widow married to a member of the household. They lived in a number of *izbas* (huts, cabins) built around the *dvor* (courtyard).

This family collective was ruled by its eldest male member known as the *bolshak* ("the great man").[1] An elderly woman known as the *bolshuka* ("the great woman") was in charge of the

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596 women and children of the household. The power of the bolshak was lifelong, but in case of mismanagement, prolonged illness or want of mental powers, the family adult male members or the village elders could remove him and place another adult male as the head man of the household.[2] All the property: land, farm implements, cattle, buildings, household furniture, and utensils were considered common property of all household members, particularly male adults. But women's clothing and other personal belongings, such as linen and canvas, brought as a dowry or produced by women were considered their private property. When such a household was broken up the common property was divided equally among all the adult male members, regardless of the degree of blood relationship.

The bolshak was assisted in his management by a family council (*soviet*) consisting of married male members, while the bolshuka was assisted by the married females. Though the bolshak's place after his death was taken by his eldest son or his eldest brother, it happened occasionally also that such a household came to be ruled by a woman, if she proved to be an exceptionally resolute personality and good manager.

596 178 476 The remnants of such a family collective persisted in some rural parts of Russia until the beginning of the twentieth century. Such a household in which some of the Old-Slavonic traditions were still in existence was looked upon as a labor association, as much as an association of blood-related families. This is why the heads of such a family commune were designated, not by parental names, as father or mother of the family, but by functional names, as managers of the common property.[3]

596 651 621 Originally the powers of the household soviet were an important check on the authority of the head elder. The soviet assured protection against inequity and tended to maintain equalitarian relationships among the married members of the household. However, early in the development of the Great-Russian society the events tended to favor the power of the bolshak. Following the practices of Mongol rule, frequent censuses were held and frequent levies were imposed on the population according to the number of households or according to acreage. The village community which composed a cess district was made jointly respon-

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sible for the whole amount of the tributes and taxes assessed. It was, therefore, in the interest of this land tax commune to favor concentration of power in the hands of the household head and to support his strictness in rule so that each household might contribute at the end of the fiscal year its share of the common tax assessment. With the lack of such a system of control, the taxes of the defaulters might fall on other members of the village community.

To meet the obligations to the tax commune it was necessary for each household to have sufficient manpower and all the farm equipment it needed. Household partition, which implied dispersal of manpower, need for new equipment, and increased taxation, was therefore frowned upon. Loitering or prolonged absence from the community also had to be discouraged. Early marriages, joint households, and rigid supervision by the elders were fostered. In addition, internal household conflicts provoked by forced regimentation and intensified because of lack of privacy, crowded quarters, insufficient food and clothing increased the need for autocratic rule:

> All in the household well know and have learned by experience that in the interest of the well-being of the household it is absolutely necessary that all obey one elder, who has knowledge and experience about the household and upon whom would depend all matters of husbandry.[4]

The landed nobility and the land-owning Church also supported the absolute power of the bolshak and disapproved of household partitions on their estates. The estate owners were bound to furnish the timber and other materials for the construction of new izbas in case of the division of an old household. They also had to provide the new households with farm equipment, all of which was a burden because it implied additional expense for the landlords. At the same time the government, which was constantly engaged in warfare and was increasingly in need of new recruits, found it more expedient to get these from large households so that the tilling of the soil would not suffer and the tax-paying powers would not decrease while military campaigns were taking place. Therefore, all the authori-

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ties—the state, the Church, the landlords, and the village tax commune—joined hands in backing the collective household system and the power of its head elder.

II

In this manner, under the pressure of circumstances, the *bolshaya* system of jointly ruled community household was gradually giving way to the *otsovskaya* system, that is, the patriarchal family in which the power-oriented steppe traditions tended to take precedence over the Old-Slavonic egalitarianism. Patriarchal traits prevailed especially in the urban strata. The father became absolute master as well as the exclusive owner of the family property in the otsovskaya system. As a result of this change in household structure all family members became economically and personally dependent upon the father; and as long as his power was supported by the state and the Church, they were expected to submit unconditionally to his will; there was no appeal against his arbitrariness, favoritism, and even misbehavior.

As a result of such a development the steppe traditions of life and death power of the father over his wife and children, the relationship of absolute dominance and complete subordination tended to be reinforced and perpetuated. The Church was particularly instrumental in this matter. Under the influence of the Church the father was likened, in the popular mind, to the Almighty. "As God is to the people, so is a father to his children" (*Kak Bog do lyudey, tak otets do detey*),[6] the people would say.

The father had at his disposal a number of ways to impose his will. Owing to the Church teachings, one of the main paternal sanctions consisted of invoking God's wrath This was done by means of malediction or withdrawal of blessing. Parental curse, as well as lack of parental blessing, was certain to bring great misfortune to the disobedient child (*Lisheniem otsovskogo blagoslovenia shchitaetsa chelovekom propashchim.*)[8] The emphasis on need of parental blessing and fear of disastrous consequences of parental curse is stressed in many Great-Russian folk customs and in their folk sayings, folk songs, and folk tales.[9]

Another instrument at the disposal of the father in imposing

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discipline on his son consisted of threat of disinheritance and banishment. If an unmarried son left the paternal house during the lifetime of his father to establish his own separate household, the father was not obliged to give him anything and might even let him go "with nothing but his cross" (*s odnim krestom*).[8] But if a married son left with his father's consent, it was the privilege of the father to determine what his share should be.[9] Also in his testamentary disposition, the father was entitled to dispose of family property at will. The father also had the right to disinherit his son and chase him away from home as a punishment for bad behavior, especially disobedience.[10] He also had the power to select the disobedient son for military conscription. According to some sources the father had the right to sell his son "four times."[11] He might show predilection in testamentary disposition.[12] Many tales tell of a father's favoritism toward an obedient son.[13]

But the way the father used most often to impose his will and assert his power was coercion (*prinuzhdenie*) by means of physical beating (*poboi*). The horse whip and the birch rod (*rozga*) were used freely in family relations. The *Domostroy*, a code of Great-Russian family practices and ethics of the urban strata compiled and edited in the sixteenth century by Priest Sylvester, a councillor and confessor of Ivan the Terrible, prescribes in detail the application of corporal punishment as a sanction of the father's authority and rule:

> Beat your son in his youth, and he will comfort you in your old age . . . And do not weaken in beating the child. Beating with a rod will not kill him, but will make him healthier . . . If you will be weak in his childhood, he will make you suffer when he grows up . . . And give him no power in youth but crush his ribs while he is growing, because when he is big he will not obey you, and you will feel annoyed and ill at heart, and your house will be ruined . . . and your enemies will rejoice at your misfortune.[14]

The popular philosophy of life as expressed in the Great-Russian folk proverbs approves of the teachings of the Domostroy. "If God gives you sons, don't be lazy, teach them and beat them"; "If he did not obey his father, he will obey the whip,"

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These attitudes implied complete dependency and self-abnegation on the part of the wife and children in relation to their master. The wife and the children were expected always to speak with respect to the father, that is, in the second person plural instead of the second person singular—the way the children addressed each other or their mother. The wife did not address her husband by his first name, but by his first and second name (patronymic) which was the way less intimate acquaintances addressed each other. The children had to demonstrate their thankfulness for the father's care and solicitude by kissing his hands. Before a bride left her parental home, custom demanded that she say to her father, "God will help you for bread and salt." And he would advise her to be obedient to her new relations: "Be obedient to them the way you were obedient to me" (*slushay kak menia slushala*).[7]

Emphasis on fear and awe, obedience and gratitude was very outstanding in the Great-Russian patriarchal family relations. These feelings and attitudes had a supernatural sanction. As a result of the teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church, it was considered in popular opinion that any disobedience or disrespect of the father's will was mercilessly punished by God who brought life-long misery and misfortune for such unfilial behavior. Even after death, the soul of a disobedient and ungrateful child could hardly escape punishment in the eternal fire of hell. Many Great-Russian folktales place a great emphasis on obedience and gratitude and stress the cruel penalty and fearful fate that awaited a disobedient and ungrateful son.[8]

Such family relations in which demands of a harsh and detached, and even capricious and arbitrary father had to be answered by humility, unconditional submission, blind obedience, love and gratitude; in which family members fought over priorities and rights; where all felt dependent upon one another and isolated from the rest of the world, could not fail to provoke tensions and cause intense family antagonisms and animosities. Such tensions and conflicts became characteristic of the Great-Russian patriarchal family and were manifested in the relations between husband and wife, father and sons, between the siblings and between the in-laws.[9]

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A Russian Peasant Wedding.

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AMONG the Russian peasants, particularly in more remote districts, the social ceremonies of a wedding are complicated and of long duration, and vastly more important in popular opinion than the church rite; for this reason we shall describe only the former. Of course, the blessing of the church is necessary to make the marriage binding, but it is comparatively an innovation, having been introduced only about one thousand years ago, while the relations represented by the social forms of the wedding date back very much farther. In them are plainly seen the former structure of the *clan* or *gens;* the opposing interests of the families of the bride and the groom; the existence, in prehistoric times of marriage by purchase and by capture amongst primitive people; the subjection of the girl to the father, in the patriarchal family, and to her father-in-law in the new home.

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It may be necessary to explain that in Russia the unit of social and economic life is the family, and that the father or eldest brother is the head of it; the young man, on marrying, does not set up for himself, but brings the bride to his father's house, where she becomes one of the daughters and takes her part in the work of the family. Only after the old man's death does separation take place; the married men divide the property and found households for themselves.

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In the family the woman is completely dominated by man, a fact that is indicated by many features in the ceremony. While

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single, the girl is allowed some freedom; she has more time at her disposal, she can go about with her friends, attend parties, etc. When married, the cares of her new position, the necessity of harder work for her new family and her altered position amongst people who are strangers to her and who look upon her as an intruder—all these reasons keep her in the house, and her time for social recreation is past. Therefore girlhood is considered the golden time in the life of a young woman, and a girl looks with dread and apprehension upon her approaching marriage; but on the other hand, love prompts her to join her husband and she hopes that his love will compensate her for what she will have to endure. In this way there is a mixture of grief and joy in the whole ceremony.

The weddings are nearly all held in the late fall or winter, when the field work is over for the year, the harvest sold and the family knows how much money it can afford to spend. When the old people have decided that their child shall marry, they ask him or her whom he or she likes best and whom next best. Marriage, it must be remembered, is often a business matter; there must be a wedding and at the chosen period. In fact, a marriage at any other time of the year is an exception. In this way it comes about that all the marriageable girls in the village are expecting their offers to come during the same week in the fall or winter, and are ready for them.

The room is cleaned and lighted up every night, the old people and the girl stay at home, while the smaller children run about the village, looking into the windows to find out how things are going on in their neighbors' houses.

The preliminaries are usually arranged between the two families, the marriage being really more the affair of these, than of the two young people themselves, since it is in fact the giving up of a working-hand by one family and her adoption into another one. The arrangements are made by friends or go-betweens. It is customary that a female relation of the groom goes to ask for the hand of the girl, and is then called a *svakha*. With her goes some old male relation or friend, who knows all the necessary forms of ceremony and is a persuasive talker; he is